

THE MINGUN BUDDHIST
HOME
FOR THE AGED



[FOUNDED IN 1915]
BY
BENEFACITOR DAW OO ZUN

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A trip to Mingun would not be considered complete if it does not include a visit to the Mingun Buddhist Home of the Aged, for is it an institution which has achieved and successfully put into practice the Myanmar Buddhist ideals of generosity, compassion and respect for the old.

Location

The Mingun Buddhist Home for the Aged is located 7 miles north of Mandalay near Mingun village, Sagaing township on the opposite bank of the Ayerwaddy River. The graceful Mya Thein Than Pagoda and Shar Yaung village are situated north of the Home and to its south lies the huge but incomplete Mingun Pagoda, the enormous guardian lions at its gateway omit (as well as Mingun village). The mighty Ayerwaddy River acts as sentinel in the east with Nan Daw Kyun village on the opposite bank.

To the west of the Home can be seen the world renowned Mingun Bell and beyond are the blue-grey hills of the Minwun Range which is a peaceful retreat for Buddhist monks and laymen alike. It is famed for having produced many learned scholars of the Buddhist Sangha.

Area

The Mingun Home for the Aged covers an area of approximately 200 feet from south to north and 300 feet from east to west. Its entire area is about 3.75 acres covered with trees large and small and is like a small oasis of peace and serenity.

Origin of the Home

The Mingun Home for the Aged was founded by Grandmother Oo Zun as she is affectionately known. Daw Oo Zun was born of silk merchant U Ei and Daw Hmyin of Mandalay, on a Friday, the 5th day of the waxing moon of war gaud in the year 1230 of the Myanmar Lunar Calendar. (referred to as Myanmar Era, M.E)

When her parents passed away, Daw Oo Zun could not overcome her grief and continued to mourning for them for a long time. Then, one day, she decided to seek comfort and happiness by looking after old people who were destitute and in need of care and protection, as her own parents. So Daw Oo Zun, to realize her plan, began by erecting three small bungalows for meditation on a pleasant spot of land near the great Mingun Bell in Mingun village on 11 January 1915. With the help of a young maid. She herself then look care of the first old people to reside in the Home. There were 95 year old Pho Sint, 98 year old Phwa Soe and 85 year old Phwa Mai.

Four years, in 1919, (1280, M.E), the number of old people in her care increased to 20. All expenses were born by Daw Oo Zun alone.

In the same year 1919, "The Min gun Buddhist Home for the Aged Association" was founded in co-orperation with U Ba Gyan and U Maung Gyi and a special fund was set up for the purpose.

In 1926, the Home was moved to its present site. However, not content with having established the Mingun Home, Daw Oo Zun extended her works of charity by founding additional Homes for the Aged in, That on, Paungde, Yangon (The Home for the Aged) and in Pakkoku. She poured all her wealth and property into these homes.

Later, on reaching the age of 60 amit, Daw Oo Zun donned robes of a Buddhist nun at the Paungde Home for the Aged and continued her meritorious deeds under the title of Phwar Thu Marlar.

Daw Oo Zun (Phwar Thu Marlar) passed away at the age of 76 at her cherished Mingun Home during the World War II, on 11 May 1944.

After the demise of Phwa Oo Zun, B I A U Maung Gyi who had collaborated with her since the formation of the Mingun Home for the Aged Association continued to oversee the management of the Mingun Home till his death in 1969.

The Emergence of The Board Of Administration

After 1973, the Government abolished the system of electing administrative officials from among members of the The Mingun Buddhist Home for the Aged Association and the home was brought under the direct administration of the government. A new Administrative and Supervisory Committee was then formed under Order No 4/81 of the Executive Committee of the Mandalay Division People's Council.

The current committee is the 7th committee in succession since the first committee was given its assignment is 6th March, 1991, together with the exhortation to "carry out their duties with good will and a spirit of generosity toward the aged."

The Organization Of The Committee

The current committee has its patron Member of the Mandalay Division Council, Director of the Divisional General Administrative Department with the Chairman of the Chan Aye Thar Zan Township Council as chairman of the committee and 14 persons of eminence from the city of Mandalay and four elders of Mingun Village as members, altogether making a total of 18 members.

Aim

The principal aim of the Home is cater to both the physical and spiritual needs of the old people of children to care for them or those children are too impoverished to provide for them.

If the situation of such old people is in accordance with the criteria and rules that have been laid down, then they are eligible for admission to the Home irrespective of class, race or creed. The home undertakes to provide food, shelter and clothing and does as much as possible to make their inevitable short stay pleasant and comfortable. The Home not only to meet their physical needs but also makes every effort to make the last moments of life spiritually tranquil.

Eligibility For Admission

- (1) The aged person must be at least 70 years old. (Exception is made in cases where the aged person is two or three years short of 70 but who is truly destitute.)
- (2) The aged person must be childless, (Exception is made in cases where the offspring themselves are impoverished.)
- (3) Documentary evidence of age such as a national Registration Card or Certificate of citizenship or any other incontestable evidence must be provided.
- (4) The aged person must be in good health-that is he or she must be mobile and not bed-ridden.
- (5) He or she shall be free from involvement in legal disputes over economic or financial affairs.
- (6) Be able to furnish a recommendation from the ward or village level Council concerned.
- (7) Two person from the ward concerned or two persons who personally know the aged person must furnish a recommendation and undertaking for admission.

- (8) Aged citizens who fulfil the above conditions shall appear for a personal interview at the Mandalay Headquarters during office hours and after filling in a bio-data form, shall then be admitted to the Home.

Rules And Regulations Of The Home

Aged persons residing in the Home have to abide by the following rules and regulations.

- (1) All healthy residents are obliged to attend daily communal prayers.
- (2) All are obliged to live together amicable and help each other.
- (3) Quarrelling among themselves, being ill-mannered towards donors, or soliciting money from visitors is **strictly** prohibited .
- (4) Each Person is obliged to keep his/her bed and living space always neat and tidy and all are responsible for keeping the entire dormitory clean.
- (5) No one shall leave the precincts of the Home without permission.
- (6) Those who are fit and healthy may visit their homes for 5 days every 6 months with the permission of the office Superintendent.
- (7) Clothes and other utensils issued by the Home is for use while in residence and are to be returned to the Home on leaving. Such property must be protected from damage or loss.
- (8) During illness, aged resident may take treatment by modern medication or by Myanmar indigenous methods whichever they smit choose.

- (9) Men and women are forbidden to visit each others dormitories.
- (10) They may report to the office superintendent with regard to their living conditions or to any difficulties that may arise.
- (11) Any violation of the Home's rules will result in dismissal from home.
- (12) Any aged person who has left the Home on any grounds shall not gain readmission.

Population Of The Home

The Mingun Home for the Aged was planned and put into operation to accommodate a total of 125 aged persons.

Today the population of the Home consists of (28) men and (49) women, making a total of (77) persons.

(According to existing records the oldest persons so far cared for by the Home were 139 year - old Pho San Ya of Sapa Yo Village, Wakema township in Phwa Oo Zun's time 113 year-Old Pho Ye of Kangyi Taung Village in the time of B I A U Maung Gyi.)

Daily Meals

The aged persons in the Home are given rice porridge or rice with beans for breakfast which is at 6 a.m daily. The mid morning meal is served at 10.30 a.m. with rice and curry and the evening meal consisting again of rice and curry is at 5 p.m. A special meal is served before 12 noon on Buddhist Sabbath days.

Arrangement For Donations

If donor wish to provide a day's meals for the old people they can donate cash amounting to (K) for special meals consisting of two meat dishes and a side dish and (K) for regular daily meals consisting of one meat dish and a side. However donor may provide any kind of food that they wish to and the Home also undertakes to provide noon day meals if so desired. Sometimes, if the donor wishes to prepare the meals, the Home provides all necessary facilities. Other donors who wish to provide all meals for the day may do so at reasonable rates, including the mid-morning meals for the Sanga, and guests. It also covers the cost of ferry boat charges both to and from the Home.

In addition to cash donated for food, other donations, such as multipurpose cash donations, donations for the miscellaneous expenses of Sanga, for water, electricity, medicines, clothes, funeral expenses, furniture and renovation of buildings may be made on a monthly or yearly basis, irrespective of the amount and depending solely on the wishes of the donor.

Clothing

Many of the old people arrive at the Home with just the clothes on their backs. So they are immediately issued beds, cupboards, blankets, mosquito nets, pillows, bed sheets and personal clothing. There is also a special arrangement to supply new clothes twice a year - light summer clothes in April and warm winter clothes twice a year - light summer clothes in April and warm winter clothing round about October which more or less coincides with the festival of lights signalling the end of Buddhists Lent.

Individual donors frequently come to the Home to personally donate jackets, shirts and longyis for the old people.

The aged residents of the Home are not obliged to wash their own mosquito nets, blankets and clothing. This chore is done by laundry staff who collect the clothes for washing every morning.

Buildings

The premise of the Home consists of three large 50' x 38' one story building for brick nagging, each with a capacity for accommodating 32 old ladies. (Phwa Thu Marla Hall, Phwa Oo Zun Hall and B I A U Mg Gyi Hall) and one large building of brick nagging capable of accomondating 28 old men. So there are four large dormitories, in addition to which there are other smaller buildings consisting of one, six - room building; two, five - room buildings; twenty two, two-room buildings and six, one-room buildings.

There are also two large prayer halls for twice daily communal prayers, a shrine room, a sanatorium for the sick, a shrine room, a sanatorium for the sick, a large dining hall, kitchen, store house and a parlour for guests. Moreover, there is a long covered passage way lines with concrete benches where the old people may sit and chat with their visitors. There are also buildings for the administrative office and library and sheds to house the generator and water pump. There are ous large and small ponds in the compound of the Home, too.

Two bronze statues erected in honour of Daw Oo Zun and B I A U Mg Gyi are also in view.

In Mandalay city itself the Home owns lands and buildings in 14 separate locations including those donated by Daw

Oo Zun. Some of the buildings have been rented out as residential building and the monthly rent is contributed towards funds for the Home. Plans have been made to construct buildings on the vacant plots of land to ensure long-term benefits for the Home.

Rest and Recreation

The administrative body, taking into two considerations, not only the physical well-being but the mental welfare of the old people, holds seasonal festivals for their recreation.

In April, when the Myanmar New Year is ushered in special events of hair shampoo and baths are organized and every nook and cranny of the Home is swept and cleaned. (This symbolizes the cleansing of the old the beginning of the fresh clean start with the new year.)

Arrangements are made to enable the old people to fast during this period, as it the custom for Buddhists. And special food is served daily both for the residents and visitors. Prayer to ward of evil (in the form of Partittas) are chanted on new year's day and gifts of new clothing are given to both residents and staff of the Home.

On the full moon day of the Myanmar month of Kason (round about May) which commemorates the Birth and Enlightenment of the Gutama Buddha, the traditional water pouring ceremony of the Bodhi tree is held in the precincts of the Dhamma Nada Monestry of the highly learned, late Mingun Sayadw (Venerable Teacher). On the eight day after full moon of Kason, the Festival of the Pyi Lon Aye pagoda, constructed

by Daw Oo Zun, is celebrated and ceremonial offering of large variety of food, fruits and other consumer goods are made to the monks residing in the area.

On the full moon day of the following month, Nayon, (Maha Thamaya Day = Day of Auspiciousness), the old people in Mandalay, and donations are made to them by well-wishers through out the journey.

On the first day after the full moon day of Waso, which commemorates the preaching of the very first sermon, the Dhama - Sakra Pawuttana and it also signals the beginning of the Buddhist Lent, the Home holds the customary ceremony of offering Waso robes to the Sangha.

In the month of Thadinkyut, the Festival of Lights is celebrated and staff and residents alike attend a ceremony at which formal apology is made to the Sanghas for any wrongdoing they may have committed (the Pawayanna Ceremony) and new suits of clothing are presented to staff and residents.

In the month of Tazaungmon (in November) the Kahtina Festival is held by the Home at which robes are again donated to the Sangha.

The month of Tazaungmon is followed by the month of Nattaw when authors, poets and other literary men and women of letters are honoured. This special day is celebrated at the Home with which music and dancing and interested old people may take part in the revelry or give literary talks and lectures if they so desire.

As part of their daily routine senior citizens of the Home attend communal prayers twice a day, once at 6 o'clock in the

morning and again at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Sermons are also broadcast by the amplifier system.

The Home also owns a television and a video cassette recorder and suitable programs are shown for residents.

Books are also available for those residents who wish to read.

Health Facilities

As part of the keeping fit programme of the Home, senior citizens are obliged to keep their surroundings clean and this helps them have some physical exercises. The Township Medical Officer of the Mingun Village Clinic, who is also a member of the Executive Committee of the Home, makes a weekly visit to the Home to give treatment of the ill and also makes additional visits as and when necessary. In between, there is a resident nurse to look after the sick according to the instruction given by the physician.

If necessary, those who need hospitalization are sent to the Mandalay General Hospital Sitagu and wachet Hospital of Sagaing. Medicines and drugs are also purchased monthly as recommended by the Physician in charge. There is also a supply of indigenous medicine for those who prefer treatment according to traditional Myanmar methods.

Assistance By The Government

The ministry of Social Welfare provides annual funds for food, clothing and rice for the Home. It provides K. 60 per month for food for each resident, and an annual fund of K 75 for clothing and k 865.60 for rice per person.

These are the increased rates authorised, beginning from the fiscal year 1991-92, by the state Peace and Development Council.

Conclusion

The Mingun Home for the Aged, founded in 1915 completed 88 years in 2003 and its Diamond Jubilee was celebrated with great funfare through out the with all kinds of entertainment as well as with religious ceremonies.

It must be acknowledged that the continued existence of the Home, which is now over 75 years old rests entirely upon the assistance and subsidies made by the government with good will; on the initiative and far-sightedness of the administrative committee members; on members of various professions and on the intelligentsia who have whole-heartedly given necessary help and assistance and on the compassion and generosity of donors countrywide with their contributions is cash and kind.

Finally the Administrative Committee would like to put on record the fact that the operation of the Home is being carried out in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Mandalay Division Social Welfare Department and the Mandalay Chan Aye Thar Zan Township Peace and Development Council.

Translated by - Daw Kyi Kyi Hla

Solgan of the Mingun Buddhist Home for the Aged.

Helping the aged and providing for their happiness and welfare is a sure way to a long life.

It might be said that the Home signifies the ancient Myanmar traditions of the respect of elders and the spirit of generosity of the Myanmar people.

